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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the frequency and purpose of interactions between rural students and teachers at the Brisbane School of Distance Education. Research regarding distance education indicated that: (1) both the school community and rural community significantly influence teacher-student interactions; (2) the student population represents diverse learning needs; (3) the frequency of teacher-student interactions is directly related to the time lapse between interaction and feedback; (4) use of interactive technology improves the quality of teacher-student interactions; (5) characteristics unique to distance education include dominance of print materials, separation of teachers from development and production of course materials, role of student motivation in independent learning, value of occasional face-to-face interaction between teacher and student, and necessity of coordinating community resources; and (6) distance education depends heavily on efficient support systems to provide quality education that meets student needs. Forty-five full-time senior students and part-time students of the Brisbane School of Distance Education completed a questionnaire. Results indicate that interactions occurred on a regular basis between students and teachers; the most popular form of communication was by telephone; the majority of students discussed their education with their family indicating that the family also had some interaction with the school; and the majority of students had more than one contact per month with their teacher--contacts mainly initiated by the teacher. This study suggests that rural communities must become involved in developing the necessary resources to ensure quality teacher-student interactions. Contains a 16-item bibliography and the student questionnaire. (LP)

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POSTER SESSIONS

A PILOT STUDY OF INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND SENIOR STUDENTS AT THE BRISBANE SCHOOL OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Beth Belton — Australia

1.00 INTRODUCTION

1.01 Background

The Brisbane School of Distance Education is a State School that provides an education for students studying from PreSchool to Year Twelve. In this school, as in other open learning institutions, the staff of the School are physically separated from their students. Students and teachers interact via a written response, telephone or other interactive technology.

Because of this physical separation the delivery of teaching and learning differs from mainstream schooling. The teacher's role is to mediate the interactions of the student with the despatched learning materials. The purpose, type, frequency and outcomes of the teacher and student interactions that are part of this mediation process, will vary according to the needs of the student. The quality of these interactions will be reflected in the educational success of the student.

The structure and content of the mailed materials are predetermined by accreditation and syllabus requirements and by standards in design and presentation. The production costs and budget constraints limit the flexibility of rewrites and major adjustments when curriculum changes are required. Therefore, the interactions between the teacher who mediates these courses and the student interacting with the course materials, are critical links. Through quality interactions with the student the teacher can ensure that courses can be adapted to cater for individual needs and current curriculum goals.

There is an expanding body of literature being published on Open Learning in Tertiary Institutions. This literature can be applied to the Brisbane School of Distance Education because of the similarity in production and delivery of teaching and learning.

A review of this literature reveals that the physical separation of students from their teachers creates special needs in the teaching and learning processes. These needs are related to:

(i) the heterogeneous nature of the student population because of:
  (a) where they live
  (b) reasons why they are isolated from mainstream schooling
  (c) individual differences affecting the ability to learn

(ii) the frequency of interactions and time lapse between the transmission and receipt of messages

(iii) the impact of and access to technology

(iv) the necessity to develop materials that suit Distance Education teaching and learning which is characterised by:
  (a) a reliance on print materials
  (b) separation of teacher from the development and production of materials
  (c) independent learning
  (d) development of strategies to provide opportunities for interactive learning.
  (e) networks across distances
  (f) highly efficient support systems.

1.02 Research problem

From observations, it was apparent that the teacher's interactions with the student have significant impact on the educational outcomes for that student. However, even though these interactions are so critical the when, why, how and satisfaction levels of these interactions have never been analysed and published. The purposes, intent, frequency and effect of these interactions needed to be researched so that this information could be shared.

These interactions are critical links between the student and the community in which the student lives and the teacher and the school community in which the teacher works. To be effective, all stakeholders need to have knowledge and understanding of these interactions so that they can accept some responsibility for ensuring that they reflect quality teaching and learning as well as guarantee appropriate educational outcomes for the student.

A literature review was undertaken to establish that teacher and student interactions are important. The literature review also was undertaken to show how distance education was different from mainstream schooling. Discussion on these differences was then related to how these impacted on teacher and student interactions.

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1.03 Research Questions

In order to carry out pilot research on interactions between student and teacher the following research questions were asked:

1. Do interactions between students and teachers occur in the Brisbane School of Distance Education?
2. Are these interactions two way? Who initiates them? Do they meet needs?
3. Are other members of the community (other than the student) involved in these interactions?
4. What is the method of delivery of these interactions and how often do they occur?
5. Can any relationships between the category of student and the interactions with the teacher be established?

For this study the research was restricted to the Senior School because rural communities all over Queensland access Senior Courses from the Brisbane School of Distance Education.

1.04 Findings and recommendations

The findings and recommendations are made on the basis of the data collected and the analysis carried out.

2.00 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

2.01 Communities and their relationship

There are two major communities impacting on the student's learing. The two communities have been identified as the school community and for the purposes of this paper, the rural community.Diagram 1 represents some of the communities

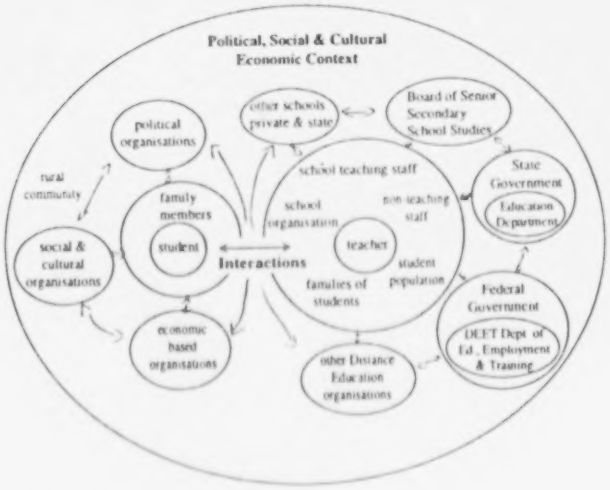

DIAGRAM 1 COMMUNITIES IN INTERACTION

impacting on student and teacher interactions. Forces impacting on these communities are related to the member composition and roles these communities have in society. The diagram gives some idea of the complexity of these.

The school community according to the statistics published by the school, March 1994 consists of almost 4000 students and their families. There are over 200 teaching and non-teaching staff.

Bodies directly impacting on the school community include Open Access who develop the learning materials, and the State Government who allocates resources and defines the role of the school. The Board of Senior Secondary School Studies is the accrediting body. The Education Department's Regional and Central Office staff set parameters for teaching and learning and eligibility of enrolment. These bodies have varying degrees of influence over the purposes, intent, frequency and type of teacher and student interactions.

The **rural community** consists of the immediate family and the rural community to which the student belongs. The family values and cultural background and the relationship of this family in the community to social, cultural, political and economic infrastructures and power structures will obviously impact directly on teacher and student interactions. The value that family and community attach to student and teacher interactions will be reflected in the frequency, purposes, intent and outcomes of these.

Stone (1992) points out that it is important to remember that the institution as well as the student has goals and objectives. A major goal of the institution for the Senior Students at distance education is to provide teaching and learning that will enable students to gain a Senior Certificate. Interactions between teacher and student will specifically occur for that purpose. However, the strategies used to develop these will depend on the skills, knowledge and attitudes of the teacher and the student.

These two communities are physically separated. Willis (1993.3) notes that because students and teachers live in different communities, geographic regions or even states they are deprived of a common community link.

This deprivation of a common community link is compensated by links developed through teacher and student interactions. Currently, in the teaching and learning experiences, it is observed that the teaching and learning operates in two separate worlds with only a superficial reference to the two communities involved.

Many of the interactions between the teacher and student are one way; they are generally initiated and controlled by the teacher. Garrison and Shale (1990:42) page note that because transactions between teacher and student are at the heart of the education process, distance education address this issue when addressing other constraints of distance.

To develop these interactions into a two way process is the responsibility of both the student and the teacher. Both communities to which they belong have resources to contribute. Both these communities should affirm and contribute to the teacher and student interactions, identifying needs and working together on solutions. Burge, Howard and Ironside (1991:55) page concluded their study of adult students in the tertiary system by noting that it is time to reconsider how a tutor can best help and nurture a earner through all the cognitive and affective stages of a distance course and

> How the Tutor would respond to the connection imperative - that driving force that encourages adults to connect with people and resources in order to solve problems and move ahead with their learning task.

The connection imperative needs stimulus, direction and support from both the student and the school community.

2.02 Student population

Holmberg (1986) compared the teachin~learning process of distance education as similar to the model of a thermostat. Any change in one part of the circle is compensated for by changes in other parts (Villaroel, 1988:59).

The two communities although working as separate entities are interdependent. Problems occurring in one are reflected in the outcomes of the other. Student and teacher interactions provide the opportunity for problems and issues to be addressed. The teacher through this interaction can negotiate or adjust the thermostat so as to meet the student needs. However, it is no use adjusting the thermostat without taking into account the environment on the outside. The teaching and learning experiences must be relevant to life in the community.

Because the student population is heterogeneous, students have a wide range of needs. Some of these needs are related to the reasons why they are isolated from mainstream school. Some are linked to individual differences that affect their ability to learn. Reasons why students are isolated from mainstream schooling are diverse. Many of the students enrolled in the Brisbane School of Distance Education live in small rural communities. Students attending small rural secondary schools access subjects from the Brisbane

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School of Distance Education to increase the subject choices. It is worth noting that enrolments from school-based students in the School have quadrupled in three years. Students who live the required distance from a local school are eligible by law to access distance education. These students in the School are categorised as Distance Students.

Families may choose to access distance education because it is home based and therefore allows them to develop particular lifestyles, work opportunities, beliefs and values. Other students may have a medical condition that prevents them from attending mainstream schools. Students may have been excluded from a mainstream school because of inappropriate behaviour. Adults or re-entry students may, because of family, work or other commitments, enrol with distance education because of flexibility in time and place. Many overseas and travelling students are also enrolled with this School but because they are not located in Queensland rural communities, they are not included specifically for discussion in this paper.

This school can cater for this heterogeneous group of students because of the structure of the School. It has a specialised system of production, delivery, interactive processes, assessment and evaluation of teaching and learning. These specialised systems prevent distance, ill health, family responsibilities, economic status, restricted human resources and time commitments from becoming barriers to accessing formal schooling.

The course materials are produced in bulk. These courses can not accommodate *student differences*. Different students need different teaching and learning strategies and feedback. During interactions between the teacher and student, identification and understanding of these differences can happen. For example a terminally ill student would require more support and adjustment to timelines than a student studying the same course but located in a small secondary school. The interactions would differ in intent, type and frequency.

The diversity of the School population is further intensified by the individual needs of students enrolled. These differences impact on how readily a student learns. Possible differences are well documented as they are found across all schools.

However, in distance education the physical separation of the student from the teacher results in a lack of visual feedback. This makes it difficult to identify and understand the extent to which these differences impact on the student's ability to learn. Interactions between teacher and student could be via such strategies as home visits or using interactive technology, to ensure correct diagnosis is made.

Some information can be only readily accessed by face-to-face contact. Other members of the family or the rural community often provide critical information that would ensure appropriate intervention or support. Willis (1992) observed that without these visual cues of face to face contact, teachers miss out on conscious and subconscious feedback that is received and analysed and form the basis for adjustments to meet needs in course delivery. Members of the rural community have a responsibility to ensure that special needs of students in their community are identified, supported and communicated to the teacher.

2.03 Frequencyand time lapse between transmission and feedback in teaching and learning

Stone (1992:6) points out that "if ever there was an opportunity for a student to academically procrastinate distance education offers that opportunity". This is reflected in the Brisbane School of Distance Education in the number of absentee notices forwarded to students in rural communities each year. If interactions are not occurring the teacher at a distance is handicapped by not being physically there. If the interactions are so far apart that relevancy and sequencing of the feedback is not possible the teaching and learning that occurs is limited.

Therefore, ensuring student's participation in teaching and learning must be a shared responsibility. The rural community needs people with literacy and numeracy skills. They have a joint responsibility with the school to ensure that students are supported, so that the opportunities for developing these skills are adequately accessed by students.

2.04 Technology

Timmins (1989) surveyed 367 students enrolled in distance education and found that the most effective way of interacting with students as an adjunct to printed study materials was via the telephone (Stone 1992:6). Other technology that provides immediate feedback are interactive computers, interactive videos, facsimile and keylink. According to O'Grady (1993:130) interactive technology is providing distance education with the opportunity to 'leap frog' over some of the anachronistic practices of traditional classrooms.

Student's in ru ral communities need the facilities to access this technology. Resources in rural communities need to be channelled into these to ensure they are available and used.

Gee (1991) noted that the technology associated with Distance Learning in The Small Schools Project in Canada heralds the beginning of the end of an old order. He concluded that using technology allowed small rural communities to access education and was much more effective as an educative process, than using other solutions such as busing students to larger settlements. His report concluded saying that costs were not greater, possibly less. He added that pedagogically, students learned as well and some learned better. Heuristically, he foreshadows a major educational breakthrough has been effected.

Gunawardena (1991) reinforces these findings by pointing out that

> if this technology is developed so as to facilitate learner and learner interaction and group work, motivation, completion rates, student satisfaction and in some situations performance is enhanced (Moore, Thompson, Dirr 1991:29).

The use of interactive technology promises to be a very effective tool for teachers and students. The students and teachers have more opportunities for negotiation, testing of ideas and on the spot problem solving and evaluation. However, as Bates (1991) points out these third generation technologies of distance education cannot be simply transferred into an industrial model. It involves new skills and adjustments to pedagogy.

When considering interactive technology Dunning (1990:26) points out that there are issues of costs, equity, exclusion, standards of quality, obsolescence, development costs, training for teacher and student to be considered. As Bates (1991:13) notes there is a good deal of evidence and theory to suggest that telelearning for example is most effective when the students are already highly motivated, highly skilled and practised in learning and thoroughly understand key concepts in the subject area.

Developing and using interactive technology is a complex issue. However, if the quality of interactions between student and teachers will, as the literature suggests, dramatically improve through the selective use of interactive technology, rural communities and the school community cannot afford not to invest in itsdevelopment.

2.05 Characteristics of teaching and learning unique to distance education

(a) *Dominance of print materials*

The dominance of print materials materials noted by (Kaye 1998) causes problems for students who have difficulty accessing information from the text. Different learning styles, levels of ability to get meaning from the text and speed with which a student reads, will impact on outcomes for the student.

In an investigation into how tertiary-level distance students use and learn from textual material during actual study sessions, Marland, Patching, I & R Putt (1991) raised issues that point to the complexity of this problem and the necessity for teachers and others concerned for teaching and learning in distance education to find out more about the difficulties students can have. They reported a variety of problems that could impact on students

having difficulty accessing information from text. These ranged from poor metacognitive skills to deficiencies in orientations, approaches and styles.

Senior courses rely heavily on print for delivery. Syllabus requirements such as 220 hours of study in courses make this necessary. The sheer volume in itself can often result in inappropriate time management and a survival mentality that can result in a superficial approach to learning.

Interactions between teacher and student are crucial in helping students. It is in the best interests of the School and the rural community, that teachers have the resources, knowledge and skills to make these interactions effective. It is also necessary if equal opportunity of access to appropriate teaching and learning is to be a reality for students in rural communities.

b) separation of teacher from the development and production of course materials

Producing teaching and learning materials for isolated learners at the Brisbane School of Distance Education has become a specialised task. Dwyer (1991) reinforces this by pointing out that the way the instructional environment is manipulated will impact (positively or negatively) on the level at which learners process information. (Moore, Thompson and Dirr 1991:24).

The design and presentation of the learning materials can increase for the students, the interest, motivation and ease of interaction for students. This can open the door for effective interactions. However, the students responses must be reinforced, evaluated and challenged through interactions with their teacher. This is a critical factor in how effective interactions with materials are.

The separation of teacher from development of the course does present a challenge as Burge, Howard and Ironside (1991) noted. The challenge is how to mediate the learning effectively so as to optimise the potential for teaching and learning. The issue Beaudown (1990) raises is how can rural and school communities ensure teachers have the conditions and motivation necessary to mediate well. Beaudown stresses the need to define the teacher as a proactive mediator between the program materials and the learner. He notes that there is no place for teachers to be only information givers or dispensers of knowledge (Burge, Howard, Ironside 1991:5).

Billings (1991) in her review of literature has alerted how important the need is to consider the social factors of learning when she found that the sociological variables appeared to significantly influence learning outcomes in distance education. Sociological variables refer to a preference for having others present in the learning environment and also for pacing and structure. Physical variables, environmental variables, psychological or affective variables apparently have little effect on learning outcomes (Moore, Thompson and Dirr 1991:23).

(c) Independent learners

Because there is a reliance on print materials and because of the volume to be read, students have to spend a considerable amount of their time independently interacting with the information provided in the text. Much of this time for students enrolled in the senior school will be alone, independent of the teacher and the home supervisor.

Independent study according to Dressel and Thompson (1973) can be defined as *the student's self-directed pursuit of academic competence in as autonomous manner as he is able to exercise at any particular time (Cline 1990:10).*

This ability to study independently is not developed without motivation, self confidence, self esteem and the ability to manage time effectively. Teachers send out workrate calendars which set out clear timelines and structure the days. However, unless the student has the capacity to respond to this and be able to work independently, learning though the Brisbane School of Distance Education will be difficult. The student and teacher interactions often need to be structured so that the necessary skills and attitudes for independent learning can be facilitated.

Stone (1992) in his research on distance education students pointed out that learners come to learning programs with different and individual needs. His research indicated that learners with external loci of control, need more regular contact and interaction with their teachers.

His findings indicated that telephone contact for some students was the most effective way in which to conduct interactions.

Families of students who lack the ability to work independently have a crucial role to play in supporting, encouraging and strengthening the links with the teacher. Without encouragement students who are not autonomous will not survive. Student and teacher interactions will be much more effective in education if they are valued and reinforced by both the communities they represent.

(d) Interactive learning and teaching

The physical separation of the teacher from student and student from student, for the majority of study time means that verbal interactions such as class discussions, debates or other group interactive learning are missing. Dillon, Gunawardena and 14

Parker (1992:13) suggest that the higher level thinking skills of synthesis, analysis and problem solving are often developed through these more interactive strategies. Therefore, the teacher and student interactions in the distance mode will have to consciously cater for higher level thinking skills in other ways. Other opportunities will have to be provided so that students can test their understanding against another student's or teacher's ideas.

Learners learning through distance education, like mainstream classroom learners, require

> cognitive and affective feedback from peers and teachers (the reactive dimension), and opportunities for discussing what they currently understand or are puzzling out themselves (the proactive dimension in learning) (Burge, Howard, Ironside 1992:6).

Teacher and student interactions need to occur sometimes in face-to-face situations. Rural communities and teachers need to collaborate to find venues and resources to ensure that this occurs.

(e) Networking across the regions and using local resources

Because students studying through Distance Education in the Senior School do not have immediate and sometimes ready access to resources such as Guidance Officers, examination rooms, and library services, students are likely to use resources if they are available, in their local community. An example of such networking is the requirement for internal assessment, where students must establish a link with an appropriately credentialled person to supervise their examinations.

Such links in the community give relevance, meaning and a holistic approach to education. Networking strategies need to be consciously planned and implemented.

2.06 Efficient support systems.

Interactions in the Brisbane School of Distance Education, like other open learning institutions depend heavily on having an efficient support system. Without such support systems for recording, despatching, publishing and accessing information, storage of student records and other information, barriers are erected preventing quality student and teacher interactions. This support system is yet another important link in the search for and practice of quality interactions between teacher and student.

At the Brisbane School of Distance Education there is, as there is in other open learning institutions, a large drop out of students from distance education. The attrition rate is over 50%. The investigations of Peters (1992) and Garland (1993) signal that this is a very complex issue. However, it must surely be the responsibility of the rural and school community to ensure that distance education is resourced so that if and when students access it, it has the capacity to provide quality education that meets the needs of the students enrolled.

The purpose of this paper is to indicate that (through teacher and student interacations) there are already existing valuable links with rural communities. These links need support and facilitation so that they can be improved. The student and teacher interactions are a vital focal point in this unique form of education and are a shared responsibility of two communities, literally kilometres apart.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this pilot study is to investigate the nature, frequency and purpose of the interactions between students and teachers at the Brisbane School of Distance Education. Exploratory quantitative research identified the frequency, the purposes and the type of interaction that were occurring between the teacher and the student. It was also used to discover whether or not these interactions were initiated by the teacher and whether the interactions were considered a valued part of the teaching and learning process.

Data has been collected from:

- documents published within the school
- questionnaires
- observations

Documents analysis

The documents analysed provided data published in the school on enrolments.

Observations

Observations were made as a participant of the teaching and learning processes of distance education.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to identify frequency and type of interaction. A copy of the questionnaire is included as appendix A. As the reader will note it is rather simple and direct. In fact upon its return it became apparent that not all the information it generated could be used. The construction of some questions and the difficulty in coding the replies led to only some data being analysed. However in the development of research (particularly when it centres around an unknown subject) pilot questionnaires are quite often the precursors to more systematic and higher yielding forms. For instance the next questionnaire would be designed to test more defined concepts and in some instances propositions which came to light in the pilot questionnaire.

Nonetheless this questionnaire was only intended to start dialogue between school and student and indicate some information about that relationship for rural communities.

A copy of the questionnaire was issued to the entire population of full-time senior students and a random selection of part - time students. In total 161 full - time students and 63 part -time students. At the time of writing almost 45% of questionnaires had been returned. From these a sub sample was taken (simple random). Finally 15 questions each were selected coded and tabled from 45 questionnaires.

4.00 FINDINGS

Set below are the row totals for the questionnaires on distance education and student contact along with the code explanation for each.

CODES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

QUESTION 1

D = distance A = approved M = medical H = home R = re-entry

S = school-based O = other

QUESTION 2

Y = yes N = no

QUESTION 3

Y = yes N = no

QUESTION 4

F = family P = peers O = other N = no discussion

QUESTIONS

Y=yesN=no

QUESTION 7

N = never S = seldom O = occasionally Fr = frequently

QUESTION 8

Y = yes N = no

QUESTION 9

Y = yes N = no

QUESTION 10

Y = yes N = no

QUESTION 11

N = never S = seldom O = occasionally Fr = frequently

STUDENT CONTACT

ROW TOTALS AND COMMENTS

Q1 N=45 MODEd=14 h=10 a=8 m=8 r=3s=1 0=1

The modal category was distance (those students who were enrolled due to isolation from a school with buildings) These were by large, country based students.

Q2N=45 Moden=38 y=7

This question defined a rural community as living in a community of less than 1000 people - of which only 7 did. However when it was considered that the modal category for enrolment is distance, the definition of a rural community being less than 1000 (ABS definition) was not useful and this question became redundant.

Q3 N = 45 Mode y = 38 n = 6 Missing values = 1

Only six students did not discuss their education with anyone. This indicates that not only the student but those who are in social contact with the student have some awareness of the school of distance education.

Q4 N = 45 Mode f = 32 0 = 4 p = 3 n = 2 Missing values = 4

The majority of students discussed their education with family indicating that the family also interacted (albeit indirectly) with the school.

Q5 N = 45 Mode y = 43 n = 2

Students do initiate some contact with their teachers.

Q7N=45 Modeo=24 s=12fr=2n=1 Missingvalues=6

Occasional contact (more than once a month) is the modal category. The fact that 12 students seldom (once a month or less) contact their teachers is a concern and does not indicate a community that networks regularly or strongly.

Q8 N = 45 Mode y = 40 n = 5

40 students were contacted by their teacher. Disappointingly a total of five students claimed to have not been contacted by the school. This indicates that communication problems (be they structural or personal) exist within the school.

Q9 N = 45 Mode y = 43 n = 2

43 students indicated that their teachers were helpful in giving assistance. However the level of this assistance really needs to be measured so that the nature and quality of teacher assistance can be scrutinised.

Q10N=45Modey=45

Q11 N =45 Modes= 17 n = 12o=6fr=2 Missingvalues=8

29 students seldom or never used the library or resource centre. This is disappointing but confirms findings in the literature discussing the difficulty of accessing information when there is such a large volume of print. It could also indicate a particular style of teaching which does not require individual research and self initiated learning. This question needs be reformed to give more specific information that relates to the teaching and learning.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

CODES

Q1 Numerical values

Q4 p = telephone w = written correspondence m = modem/ computer np = no preference o = other

Q5 fl = flexibility i = isolation tr = teacher relationship hs = home study o = other

Q6 i = isolation tr = teacher relationship a = asssesment o = other

Q7 Y = yes N = no

DISTANCE EDUCATION

ROW TOTALS AND COMMENTS

Q1 N=45 Mode0= 171 = 13 2=9 3=3 4=2

17 students had yet to take part in activities and thirteen had taken part in only one activity. The School puts a lot of its resources into extension services. This question needs to be followed up to see why this is so.

Q4 N 45 Modep=25w= 12 np= 1 m = 1 0=1 Missing values=5

The most popular form of communication was by telephone. This finding supports the investment made by the school when each teacher was given a personal telephone extension in 1993. The literature review also supports the popularity of this technology.

Q5 N 45 Modefl = 17hs=7 o=6tr=5 i=2 Missingvalues=8 Flexibility in study arrangements was the most endearing feature of distance education to its students followed by the choice of being able to study from home.

Q6 N=45 Modeo=Str=8 a=7 i=6 Missing values 16

The modal category for this question is really that of missing values. One might infer that students did not want to criticise openly. Other than that teacher relationship assessment and isolation were the other main areas of contention.

Q7 N = 45 Mode y = 44 N = 1

44 students had previously studied at a school with buildings.

Q8 d = 44 o = 1

5.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this pilot study give evidence that interactions are occurring on a regular basis between teachers and students. It shows that teachers and students value these. However, it also shows that the initiation and control of these interactions is mainly hands of the teachers. This is of concern in light of the literature review on distance education which supports the view that teaching and learning should provide opportunities for transactional learning. The delivery of teaching and learning needs to facilitate active participation so that students actively participate in the teaching and learning processes. The responsibility to ensure this occurs must be a shared one between the rural and school communities so that the quality of education is such that the educational outcomes are successful and supportive ofthetwo linked communities. The findings indicate that the majority of students discuss their school work with family or peers. This offers a passage way for community involvement.

The findings indicate that the families of students in the rural community value and support interactions. It is important that this support is developed. It is recommended that the rural community and other communities accessing distance education, become involved in developing the necessary resources and processes so that appropriate two way interactions are guaranteed. It is recommended that rural communities accept and act on, in collaboration with the School community, the responsibility for ensuring that student and teacher interactions reflect the quality education in distance education.

This pilot study has shown that interactions are occurring. Evidence has been extracted on the purpose, frequency and relationships of these.

It is hoped that this will make members of the rural community aware that students in their community are forming crucial links in education. These links need community

support.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken so that rural communities have a much greater understanding of what distance education offers and in what ways they can have a role in improving it.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Distance Education

1. Do you take part in any of the following activities? (circle as many as you wish)

   Camps Tutorials Work Experience
   School Visits Home Visits Work at Australia Post
   Activity Days

   Others: _____

2. If you did take part in any of these activities, did you enjoy them?

   (Yes or No) _____

3. If you answered yes, can you explain why? If you answered no, can you explain why not?

   _____

   _____

4. How do you prefer to communicate with us at the School of Distance Education?

   _____

   Why? _____

5. What do you like best about studying with this school?

   _____

   _____

6. What don't you like about studying with this school?

   _____

   _____

7. Have you ever studied in a school with buildings? (Yes or No)

   _____

8. If you answered yes, which type of school did you prefer?

   _____

   Why? _____

   _____

QUESTIONNAIRE 2

Distance Education

1. What is your student type? (please circle one)

   Distance Approved Medical Home Re-entry Other School-based

2. Do you live in a rural community (a town with less than 1000[1] people living in it)? (Yes or No)

   _____

3. Do you discuss your school work with anyone who is not your teacher? (Yes or No)

   _____

4. If you answered yes to Question 3, who do you discuss your school work with? (maybe your mother, father, fellow student, sister or brother)

   _____

5. Do you ever ring or write to your teachers? (Yes or No)

   _____

6. If you answered yes, why do you contact your teachers?

   If you answered no, why don't you contact your teachers?

   _____

   _____

7. How often do you contact your teacher? _____

8. Does your teacher contact you? (Yes or No) _____

9. How do you feel about the contact you have with your teacher, does she/he help you with your school work?

   _____

   _____

10. Your teacher sometimes writes comments on your paper. Do you read these? (Yes or No)

    _____

11. How often do you contact the library or resource centre?

    _____

12. Why do you contact the library or resource centre?

    _____